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ABSTRACT

The paper compares educational and occupational aspirations and expectations of 500 black and white students from a San Antonio college. Previous research had produced conflicting theories of social class and race as determinants of expectations. This study employed a self-administered questionnaire which included the Occupational Aspiration Scale (OAS). The OAS provided to every respondent the same set of occupational alternatives in terms of idealistic aspirations and realistic expectations. Other questions assessed educational aspirations and expectations, as well as independent variables through which racial and social class differences could be identified. Results indicated that blacks and whites had similar educational aspirations, but that blacks had higher realistic expectations. More whites than blacks had low occupational aspirations. Blacks had higher occupational expectations. These results, which conflict with some previous research, may be due to sample bias and the effects of recent legislation to improve educational and occupational opportunities for minority groups. The results support the theory that race, not social class, influences expectations and aspirations. (AV)

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Educational and Occupational Aspirations and Expectations of Black and White College Students

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Educational and Occupational Aspirations and
Expectations of Black and White College Students

The results of the published research on the racial aspects of educational and occupational aspirations and expectations, which dates from the 1930's, have not been uniform but cluster around two opposing theories. One theory is that the relationship between occupational and educational aspirations and expectations is a function of social class (Linton, Form, Hyte, Stephenson, Centers), and that individuals in lower social classes have lower aspirations and expectations than individuals in higher social classes. The other theory is that race rather than social class is the major explanatory force in setting the levels of educational and occupational expectations (Lorenz, Antonousky and Lerner, Dreger and Miller, Gray, Henderson), in that blacks express equal or higher occupational and educational aspirations than whites of comparable socio-economic class, but that when pressed for a realistic assessment of their goals blacks report expectations which are below those of similar whites. While the results of most of the published research on this subject fall on a continuum between these two viewpoints, further evidence is clearly needed to directly access the effects of race on educational and occupational aspirations and expectations.

Another reason for conducting a study of the racial aspects of occupational and educational aspirations and expectations is that a number of significant changes have occurred in the environment of blacks since the earlier studies of the subject were done. For instance, the

educational experiences of blacks may have been influenced by the federal legislation on equality of educational opportunity. And black attitudes toward employment opportunities may have been affected by the federal legislation designed to eliminate the discrimination in hiring and promotion. In addition, having witnesses the misdirection and corruption among high level government officials, blacks may feel the need for and have recognized the opportunity to determine their own destiny by pursuing these predominantly white occupations.

Methods.

In the fall of 1975, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed to students in all freshman orientation, social science, and English classes at St. Philip's College in San Antonic. This resulted in a sample which comprised 51 percent of the freshman class. While there are systematic differences between the students who were in these classes and those who were not, such as the greater likelihood of commerical students not being in the sampled classes, none of these differences should appreciably moderate ethnic differences in the dependent variables since such factors should proportionately affect both black and white groups.

In addition to securing attitudinal and demographic information from the unpaid respondents, the questionnarie included the Occupational Aspiration Scale (OAS) (See Miller and Haller). The OAS provides to every respondent the same set of occupational alternatives for choice in terms of idealistic aspirations (the best job from the list which

the student would choose if he were free to chose any) and realistic expectation (the best job from the list which the student feels really sure he can get when his schooling is over). The OAS has substantial reliability as demonstrated by standard errors of measurement in three independent samples in three different cities of 5.48, 4.75, and 5.70. It reliability coefficient is .80 (De Hoyos).

Educational aspirations and expectations were measured by questions concerning the number of course, semesters, or years of college training each respondent planned to complete. For educational aspirations the question was "If it were possible for you to complete as much education a you wanted, how much would you like to complete?" and for educational expectations the questions was "In reality, how much education do you expect to complete?" (See Haller and Butterworth)

The choices on the four questions (occupational aspirations, occupational expectations, educational aspirations, and educational expectations) were assigned numeric value based on prestige for occupation and grade level for education. These assigned values were then arranged into respective frequency distribution and the thirty-third and sixty-sixth percentiles were determine and used to divide responses into categories of low, medium, and high on each of the four dependent variables.

The collection of a number of independent variables, such as age, sex, family income, and father's occupation, made it possible to table analyze aggregate differences by race so that the potentially moderating influences of these variables could be inspected.

Findings

Table 1 shows the educational aspirations and expectations of approximately 300 black students and approximately 200 white students. (All tables are presented at the back of the paper.)

There are no statistically significant differences at the .05 level (using Chi-square) between the educational aspirations of these black and white students, but the black students appear to have notably higher realistic expectations. Significantly fewer black students than whites students (64.0 percent compared to 73.3 percent) have low educational expectations and relatively more black students have medium (27.7 percent compared to 15.1 percent) and high (8.3 percent compared to 6.6 percent) educational expectations. Thus, while both black and white students in this sample have lower realistic than idealistic educational expectations, the two measures (idealistic and realistic) are more alike for the blacks. This pattern was almost consistently independent of the other variables (sex, father's education, family income, etc.) and, in the few cases where statistically significant differences occurred, a suppressor effect was noticed. That is, in a few categories established by cross-tabulating across the other variables, the aggregate pattern of no significant differences was accentuated to statistical significant but always in the same direction.

In Table 2 are shown the occupational aspirations and expectations of these black and white students. A significantly larger percentage of white students indicated low occupational aspirations, a significantly larger percentage of black students indicated medium occupational

occupational aspirations, and a significant difference was noticed between the occupational aspirations of the two races at the higher level. There were no statistically significant racial differences in occupational expectations at the low and medium levels because, while the same percentage (about 65 percent) of blacks were in the low and medium expectation categories as had been in the same categories of occupational aspirations, the percentages for the two categories increased for whites from 65.1 percent to 77.2 percent. There was a statistically significant racial difference favoring blacks in the high occupational expectation category because whites lowered their occupational expectations from idealistic (34.9 percent) to realistic (27.2 percent) by 7.7 percent. Thus, there are clear patterns of little change, perhaps a slight lowering, for blacks between occupational aspirations and expectations and a significant lowering of aspirations in the light of realism among whites. When these patterns were examined across the dimensions of the other potentially moderating variables the basic result was that the patterns were largely independent and in certain cases examples of the suppressor effect.

Conclusions

That the racial differences in educational and occupational aspirations and expectations are largely independnet of the effects of a number of indicators of social class raises doubt about the "social class" explanation for variations between blacks and whites

in these attitudes. And that racial differences held up when separated across a number of other variables lends considerable support to the theory that educational and occupational aspirations and expectations are significantly affected by race.

A number of the results of the present study contradict what has been found in the earlier studies of this subject. For instance, there were no significant racial differences in educational aspirations, and the educational expectations of blacks were typically higher than the educational expectations of whites. Furthermore, while blacks and whites had about the same occupational aspirations, black tended to be less likely than whites to lower their occupational expectations in the light of reality.

There are a number of possible explantions for these contradictions. It is possible, for example, that the sample itself is biased. Since the college where the sample was drawn has traditionally been thought of as a black college, with an enrollment which was until recently predominately black, it may be that whites with higher educational and occupational aspirations go to one of the other four (predominately white) colleges in San Antonio or to a university outside the city. Unfortunately, we know of no available data with which to evaluate this proclivity among whites or among blacks.

Another possible interpretation is that over the last ten years, since the passage and implementation of legislation to equalize educational and occupational opportunities, that the attitudes of blacks toward the possibility of their own success has improved.

Also, being confronted with constant inflationary trends in the economy compared to stagnant earning ability in traditionally low skill jobs held by blacks and the step-up in legislation to eliminate historically popular illicit occupations (such as pimp, confidence men, hustlers, dope pushers, etc.), blacks who want to realize their potential and enjoy the fruits of wealth and power may see this realization only possible through redirecting their energies into mentally enlightenment and legal, promising employment.

Table 1

Educational Aspirations and Expectations

of Black and White College Students

	Aspiration		Expectations	
	Black	White	Black	White
Low	29.5%	31.9%	64.0%	78.3%**
Medium	37.7	42.1	27.7	15.1**
High	32.8	26.0	8.3	6.6**
(Cases)	(302)	(204)	(300)	(198)

** $p < .05$

Table 2

Occupational Aspirations and Expectations

of Black and White College Students

	Aspirations		Expectations	
	Black	White	Black	White
Low	25.8%	34.5%*	35.9%	41.3%
Medium	39.2	30.6*	28.2	31.5
High	35.0	34.9	35.9	27.2*
(Cases)	(306)	(206)	(306)	(206)

* $p < .05$

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